

University of Nebraska - Lincoln  
**DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln**

---

Honors Theses, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Honors Program

---

Spring 3-11-2019

# Theatrical Trailers in the Modern World: Advertisement or Art?

Katherine O'Neil

*University of Nebraska - Lincoln*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/honorstheses>

---

O'Neil, Katherine, "Theatrical Trailers in the Modern World: Advertisement or Art?" (2019). *Honors Theses, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*. 90.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/honorstheses/90>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors Program at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses, University of Nebraska-Lincoln by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

THEATRICAL TRAILERS IN THE MODERN WORLD:  
ADVERTISEMENT OR ART?

An Undergraduate Honors Thesis  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
University Honors Program Requirements  
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

by

Katie O'Neil, BJ

Advertising and Public Relations

College of Journalism and Mass Communications

March 11, 2019

Faculty Mentors:

Patti Harney, BSE, Advertising and Public Relations

Valerie Jones, MS, Advertising and Public Relations

## **Abstract**

Theatrical trailers are a complex medium which consist of elements of both advertisement and of art. As films and their marketing strategies have developed over time, one may question the “status” of a modern theatrical trailer, particularly as an advertisement or form of creative expression. My thesis addresses this question by providing an analysis of theatrical trailers and their status as advertisement and art; describing briefly the process of producing a trailer; and discussing the evolution of trailers and their changing role in the movie industry.

The basis of my argument relies upon several film studies books dedicated to the research of trailers in a variety of contexts. Supplemental research included reviewing reports published by the Motion Pictures Association of America, reading articles from newspapers and magazines online, and exploring contemporary forums and blogs. Through the process of researching and writing this paper, I have concluded that trailers, which are of course designed as advertisements, may be rightly considered art — as can other forms of advertising.

**Key Words:** trailers, movies, advertising, film studies, art

## **Dedication**

This project would not feel complete without an acknowledgement of the support I received from my family, friends, and faculty mentors. In particular, thank you to my parents and brothers for their proofreading and feedback, and to my thesis advisers, Patti Harney and Valerie Jones, for their insight and encouragement.

## **Theatrical Trailers in the Modern World:**

### **Advertisement or Art?**

Spoiler alert: theatrical trailers are a fact of modern American life. According to a recent report by the Motion Pictures Association of America, “More than three-quarters (76%) of the U.S./Canada population aged two or older, or 263 million people, went to a movie at the cinema at least once in 2017”, qualifying them as “moviegoers” (*THEME*, 2018, p. 17). And as any moviegoer knows, trailers constitute an integral part of the cinema experience. But as familiar as they are, little thought is usually given as to what a trailer actually is.

The general purpose of trailers at first seems simple. Like any commercial, the primary function of a trailer is to sell the product: a movie. Trailers are designed to appeal to a specific audience and to generate interest in the movie within that demographic, with the ultimate goal of revenue from various forms of distribution, particularly box office sales. They offer a glimpse of the film with the goal of economic gain. In short, they are intended to sell the product. Therefore, at their core, trailers are a form of advertisement. Yet at the same time, these videos are an original, imaginative way of telling a story in their own right. The minimum criteria of promoting a commercial product does not encapsulate all that a trailer is. More eloquently stated, “Trailers are at once ads and more than ads” (Kernan, 2004, p. 8).

A trailer not only attempts to sell a product, but does so in a way that requires particular human innovation and creativity because of the high stakes involved, as will be discussed later. Modern trailers involve important elements of imagery, storytelling, and the communication of emotions and ideas, traits often associated with artistic expression. In this light, theatrical trailers can rightly be described both as advertisements and a form of art.

An examination of the nature of theatrical trailers is particularly relevant in the modern world. In today's hyper-connected society, it is more important than ever that producers get trailers right; they are the first glimpse an audience has of an upcoming attraction. "The theatrical trailer is often the first chance to promote a movie to its target audience. Starting up to a year before the release of a major studio movie, distributors run movie trailers that are meticulously edited and audience-tested" (Roos, 2008). The initial viewing must intrigue potential moviegoers enough to choose to buy a ticket. Indeed, trailers benefit potential moviegoers in their choice of which film, if any, they choose to watch: "[Trailers] serve a vital indexical purpose [...] since the mediascape is simply too large for any one of us to watch everything. Promos allow us to schedule our media consumption patterns, working as something akin to a menu for future consumption" (Gray, 2010, p. 52).

This paper deals not only with the distinct elements of advertising as commercial enterprise and art as creative production, but seeks to illustrate the natural link regularly found between the two. In this context, the artistic dimension of an advertisement could be called its quality. An ad as art is not just a matter of quantity — for example, plastering the name as widely as possible. Though there is much to be said for quantity, it is the quality of advertisements that makes the difference in the modern age. With an ever-expanding field of options available to modern audiences, it is the artistic flair and imagination of a trailer that quickly and efficiently give it an edge over the competition. To do this effectively, it requires attention to the non-quantifiable aspects of the advertisement — the creativity, the originality, etc. An element of surprise or wit makes for a more memorable ad. To recognize the inclusion of art in advertising can help advertising become better and more effective.

Ultimately, theatrical trailers are a complex medium which consist of elements of both advertisement and of art. As films and their marketing strategies have developed over time, one may question the “status” of a modern theatrical trailer, particularly as an advertisement or form of creative expression. Though an “ad or art” classification may seem like a simple question, the answer is more complicated. My thesis addresses this question by providing an analysis of theatrical trailers and their status as advertisement and art; describing briefly the process of producing a trailer; and discussing the evolution of trailers and their changing role in the movie industry.

### **Analysis of Trailers as Promotional Material**

#### **What is a Trailer?**

To begin, a clear definition of a theatrical trailer is necessary: a trailer is “a brief film text that usually displays images from a specific feature film while asserting its excellence, and that is created for the purpose of projecting in theaters to promote a film’s theatrical release” (Kernan, 2004, p. 1). Producers create (or “cut,” as they say in Hollywood) these brief videos as part of the overall marketing campaign to promote an upcoming film. As early as 1912, companies began including brief advertisements that played after — “trailed” after — the feature film that audiences had come to see; thus, the name “trailers” emerged (Kernan, 2004). Originally these clips followed the end of a movie. Now the advertisements for new releases play before the movie starts, but the name stuck.

Despite their simple appearances, trailers are intricately designed and multi-layered. “Trailers provide unique and specific rhetorical structures that fold visual and auditory evidence

of the film production industry's assessment of its actual audience (as well as its desires for a potential audience) into a one- to three-minute cinematic experience" (Kernan, 2004, p. 3). These promotional videos are highly crafted, researched, and tested with focus groups to leave nothing to chance. Every frame is calculated.

While "a movie's first week at the box office has always been important [...] it's become even more crucial as studios release greater numbers of films, effectively shortening the window that a movie has to make money in the theater" (Turner). Opening weekend box office results can make or break a movie's financial success, including in the home entertainment and merchandising markets, and determine whether critics view the film as a triumph or a flop. As reporter Dave Roos explained in an article about film marketing:

One of the most important indicators of the success of a movie marketing campaign is the gross box office sales from the first weekend of a movie's release.

Opening weekend sales are a direct reflection of how much buzz and excitement has been generated by the promotional campaign. (Roos, 2008)

If a movie does not fare well its first weekend, it may be "pulled from theaters," which limits its earning potential even more. Thus, the stakes are high — the success of the trailer as an advertisement affects the success of the entire movie. However, it is the success of the trailer as art that determines whether the film can attract and communicate its message to the desired audience. Seen in this way, the significance and complexity of a trailer becomes more and more clear.

Despite the influence and sway that trailers can supply, research on trailers is relatively new. Lisa Kernan's *Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers* is viewed by several



authors as the definitive full-length book on movie trailers (Gray, 2010). Her book, published in 2004, examines trailers as a separate genre in film and highlights conventions used in the industry, analyzed in examples throughout the history of films with sound. Jonathan Gray is another author who has studied trailers. His book *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* explores the understanding audiences have from materials “extra” or “bonus” in addition to a film itself. These *paratexts* — like trailers, print media, behind-the-scenes content — give prospective customers a glimpse of what to expect from the feature film.

Other film studies research pertinent to trailers includes works about branded entertainment, product placement, and similar fields. For instance, Keith Johnston’s *Coming Soon: Film Trailers and the Selling of Hollywood Technology* focuses on the advances in film technologies, such as synchronized sound and 3D, and how trailers are involved. “Through unified analysis, trailers are revealed as complex, layered texts that cross media boundaries, act as a site of historical discourse, challenge existing debates, and foreground the place of technology as a key element of their success” (Johnston, 2009, p. 25). His discussion includes the movement into the digital age and how the internet has changed the way trailers are distributed.

Trailers are an “innovative short film format” that can be “analyzed in themselves, for what they say, [and] for how they communicate” (Johnston, 2009, p. 9). A trailer offers audiences the first glimpse into a story and is a critical component of a film’s marketing campaign. Each trailer must condense a complicated plot and characters from a full-length film into a short piece that raises just enough questions and emotions to leave a viewer hungry for

more. As interviewed in an *Inc.* article, California-based trailer producer Nick Temple said, "The best trailers create an immediate impact that raises questions and intrigues the audience but doesn't give away so much that they feel like they can connect all the dots" (Blakely, 2015). They should be cut in a brief, attention-grabbing way that calls curious viewers to action, without seeming hokey or contrived: "An awesome trailer really depends on the studio's marketing department and the degree to which they're able to articulate a vision" (Kim, 2014). Of course, these ideas are not limited to trailers. All advertisements seek to simplify multiple goals into a clear, convincing message that invites consumers to action.

### **What is Advertising?**

"Advertising is a paid communication used to persuade someone to buy a product or service of an identified sponsor. [...] the message is created to appeal to a specific, defined group of people" (Einstein, 2017, p. 5). The technology and media used to reach these target audiences have changed dramatically over time, but the central purpose of advertising remains constant: "to get the right message to the right person at the right time and place" (Einstein, 2017, p. 5).

Advertising is useful only as long as advertisements reach target markets as intended and the contact results in action on the part of the potential consumer. Without awareness, recognition, and eventually purchase of a good or service by consumers, a company cannot survive. Not everyone must be aware of a brand, but it must be known at least by the potential consumers most likely to purchase its goods or services (Lehu, 2007, p. 18).

Many people have a negative impression of advertising, likening the field to a stereotypical used car salesperson. However, an advertisement is much more than a surface-level

street vendor pushing merchandise. Instead, it is the underlying strategy that makes an ad memorable and effective: “...the selling idea beneath an ad’s surface determines its success” (Felton, 2013, p. 5).

Good advertising tells a story. For instance, although a TV commercial may last only 30 seconds, it can take its audience on a thrilling, emotional journey full of tension and conflict and leave viewers yearning for more. An effective trailer does much the same. It requires the viewer to understand and act on a message. Advertisements do not communicate this message “simply by telling us to buy such products or services, but by creating a life, character, and *meaning* for all manner of products and services” (Gray, 2010, p. 3). Modern consumers are not naive — a company must reach them where they are and fulfill a genuine need. There is a real danger for brands that lose sight of this understanding: “...the ad has to have something to say, something that matters. Either it talks to real people about real needs, or it speaks to no one” (Felton, 2013, p. 7). An advertisement needs to be able to communicate its meaning to an audience. Communicating this meaning is the place of art.

### **What is Art?**

The character of art is difficult to precisely state, as the debate regarding the essence of art has been ongoing for thousands of years. A wide variety of definitions have been proposed, often conflicting with each other, and some writers question whether art is possible to define at all. What often comes to mind at the mention of “art” are the fine arts. Many characteristics of the fine arts are indeed found in trailers. For instance, the importance of perspective and use of color is essential in cinematography, just as it is in painting. The timing of dance is paralleled in

the way a trailer's scenes are juxtaposed. Similarly, music's power of emotional ebb and flow is utilized in trailers. The mastery of industry-standard techniques is required to demonstrate finesse in this field, just as the fine arts (or any discipline) require the knowledge and understanding of general principles.

That being said, we can speak of art not only in the narrow sense of fine arts, but also in a general sense. While a precise, universal definition of art may be unavailable, it is safe to say that "traditionally, artworks are intentionally endowed by their makers with properties, often sensory, having a significant degree of aesthetic interest, usually surpassing that of most everyday objects" (Adajian). Put in other words, "works of art are works produced by human creative skill and imagination" (*New American Oxford Dictionary*). This description refers broadly to pieces of art themselves, but art can also be considered in another way; art may generally be said to be the creative communication of ideas, as expressed in a given medium. As one blogger put it, "Art is a certain kind of specialized communication. [...] Art does not equal communication, but all art is communication" (Crockett, 2006).

Both advertisements and art communicate meaning. One view, though perhaps overly simplistic, is that advertisements are generally created for the sake of a business interest; on the other hand, art can convey any number of things — stories, allegories, social messages, religious truths, or simply a representation of something in the world. By using art's power of communication, it seems that by making advertisements "artful" they can become better or more effective because they may now carry a deeper message. This idea leads to many brands selling the feelings or experiences associated with a product rather than merely the product itself. For example, a company could post a sign that plainly says "buy marshmallows," or it could use a

photo of a family roasting marshmallows over a campfire — now the brand is selling happiness, family time, and fond memories.

Some would even say this type of communication is art's proper role. As quoted in an article in *The Atlantic*, Michelangelo Pistoletto wrote, "Above all, artists must not be only in art galleries or museums—they must be present in all possible activities. The artist must be the sponsor of thought in whatever endeavor people take on, at every level" (Popova). Similarly, as long as the goal of an advertisement is to provoke thought and spark action in a potential consumer, art should be included in advertisement. As blogger Rex Crockett reasoned:

If art is communication, it follows the rules of communication. If it's too original, it is difficult for people to understand. If it is too unoriginal, it is a bore. Too loud and it is irritating. Too quiet and it has no impact. If the subject bears no relationship with the experiences of the perceiver, it is not likely to be grasped. If it deals with a subject in a way that is not stimulating, it is not likely to be valued.

(Crockett, 2006)

If one substitutes "advertisement" for "art" in Crockett's paragraph, the meaning still holds true. To be successful as communication, and therefore as advertising itself, advertisement must walk a fine line. Fortunately, the incorporation of art contributes a great deal toward advertisement's ability to communicate.

It should be noted the way elements of advertisement and art perceived in trailers depends on the individuals involved. Film executives may be more inclined to see the business interests that a trailer is designed to promote, namely ticket sales. On the other hand, designers may be more likely to emphasize the creative or expressive importance of a trailer — the art.

Likewise, the preferences and experiences of audience members and critics impact their understanding of the complementarity of advertisement and art in trailers. Nevertheless, both are crucial for the trailer's success.

## **Production Process**

### **Who, When, and How**

The relationship between advertisement and art inherent in theatrical trailers can be readily seen in the way they are produced. Many people are surprised to learn that filmmakers typically do not create their own trailers — instead, separate specialized agencies cut trailers. The marketing expertise, knowledge of consumer demographics and media behaviors, and ability to tell a story in one or two minutes all lead movie producers to outsource projects to trailer agencies.

Agencies compete between themselves to cut trailers, which gives film studios the opportunity to see different interpretations and options; ultimately a studio can select whichever approaches it likes and then test them with consumers (Hooton). The competition is understandably fierce: as another article explains, “If they’re chosen by the studio to finish a campaign, the final payout can reach up into the millions depending on the number of trailers, teasers, TV spots, and online campaigns that are ultimately created” (Kitchen). Almost all of the major trailer agencies are in Los Angeles or New York City, including companies such as Trailer Park and Buddha Jones.

Because it can take months or years to cut a trailer, editors often receive footage while the movie is still being filmed, or sometimes even before filming has started. In these latter

cases, editors must rely heavily on the script and daily footage from the filmmakers (Kitchen). As such, there can be major changes in the meantime, such as altered characters, modified dialogue, or scenes being cut from the film. Special effects are often not added yet when editors are piecing together the trailer. Another downside is that since the members of the agency may not have seen the movie yet, they may accidentally include clips in the trailer that turn out to spoil important plot points.

To some viewers, trailers may appear to be solely a form of advertisement for full-length films: “[trailers provide] ‘free samples’ of them, trailers can be seen to reframe their original fictional film narratives into a (window) shopper’s world. [...] trailer spectatorship is one of the primary sites where audiences are pointedly ‘shopping’ for films” (Kernan, 2004, p. 6). Some moviegoers arrive after a film’s official start time to avoid being a captive audience forced to watch the pre-movie advertisements. On the other hand, some moviegoers ensure an early arrival to watch for upcoming attractions they may find interesting. While these “free samples,” as Kernan calls them, can be easily dismissed by audiences as simply another item competing for their attention, if new movies are advertised in an artful, interesting way, they are more likely to earn moviegoers’ consideration.

### **Techniques and Conventions**

As mentioned briefly above, trailer producers often follow consistent industry trends and standard techniques, as do professionals in any field, including art. Some conventions — voice-over narration, for example — are popular for a while, then fade out of use over time.

However, even with the changes in style or effects, the overall format of trailers remains the same.

Trailers typically share several features, including titles or narration, clips from the film, action-filled montages, and well-known actors or producers (Kernan, 2004). The characteristics of trailers often vary based on the type of movie. For example, the trailer for an action film will be cut differently than a romantic comedy or a drama. The trailer gives the potential moviegoer clues about what to expect from the film (Gray, 2010).

Another significant aspect of a trailer includes the music and sound design. Audio plays a key role in setting the ambience or mood of a trailer. For instance, the menacing ticking clock sound throughout *Dunkirk* helps convey the ever-present threat of attack; thus it was important to include in the trailer. The importance of the combination and cohesiveness of music and images cannot be overstated. Ron Beck, the owner and creative director of a trailer company, went so far as to say, “Music is at least 50 percent of any trailer” (Ross, 2017). These and other conventions are just a few of the common techniques used in production.

## **Evolution of Trailers**

### **Historic Context**

The production process as we know it today has changed immensely since trailers were first introduced. With the evolution of trailers, the roles and techniques of advertisement and art within trailers have likewise evolved. Now-well-established customs like the use of target market demographics, media consumption behaviors, and other research data inform the business decisions related to trailers as advertisements. In a similar manner, the use of music, sound



effects, and montage edits, among others, have contributed to the lasting impression artfulness can provide in a trailer. These are all now common practices, but it took time for them to emerge.

Trailers as we now know them have been developing for over a hundred years. What is now recognized as the first trailer began in 1912 as a serial called “The Adventures of Kathlyn,” which played in theaters after feature films ended (Kernan, 2004). This thirteen-part story was the first to use the now familiar “cliffhanger” to keep audiences on the edge of their seats and return for the next part; this concept introduced the idea of trailers and revolutionized marketing for films.

This evolution was in part possible thanks to advances in equipment, such as the developments of new technologies in the 1920s. It was during this time that trailers began to have more defined structures using montages of the film’s scenes, as well as on-screen titles and effects (Johnston, 2009). Although trailers used to cut clips from the film to form a short synopsis, producers no longer prioritize a clear summary of the plot:

“In trailers, images are selected and combined in ways that privilege attracting the spectator’s attention over sustaining narrative coherence. Yet trailers also maintain a relationship to the narrative they promote, and in this relationship between promotional images of attraction and coherent cinematic narrative lie the unique characteristics that constitute the rhetoric of trailers.” (Kernan 7)

In place of a basic narrative structure, trailers began to use other means to attract audience interest. Improvements in the use of color, picture, and sound, such as the introduction of new special effects in the 1950s and emphasis on music in movies in the 1980s, were all utilized in

trailer production (Johnston, 2009). These innovations set the direction for the continued development of trailers.

### **Teasers, Pre-trailers, and the Digital Age**

Trailer production has seen its most rapid advancements in recent years. "...since the boom in high-speed connection, film trailers are now accessible on different websites, with the aim of enlarging their communications spectrum. [...] they are accessible to the entire planet, 24 hours a day throughout the chosen promotion period" (Lehu, 2007, p. 196). To stay relevant in this fast-paced world, advertisers must alter the way they reach potential moviegoers. Two innovative methods to approach today's digital environment and short attention spans have emerged: teasers and pre-trailers. These two methods are evidence that staying clever and artful increases the likelihood that consumers notice an ad.

A "teaser" acts as a trailer... for a trailer. It's often a sneak peek that introduces characters, minor plot points, and generates excitement for the movie. Many studios cut multiple teasers and trailers for each film, often using different editing or languages, with the intention of keeping viewers hooked until they go to a theater to watch the film (Lehu, 2007, p. 197). As part of the overall marketing campaign, a teaser adds to the continual build-up of excitement surrounding a film's release, all the while not giving too much away. As such, the teaser may be indicative of the full-length trailer or film: "[they] may construct early frames through which would-be viewers might think of the text's genre, tone, and themes" (Gray, 2010, p. 2).

In a similar way, a "pre-trailer" also seeks to contribute to the buzz surrounding an upcoming release. Pre-trailers shorten the trailer even more to hook viewers in the span of a few

seconds. One example includes the six-second clip before the full-length trailer for *Passengers*. Pre-trailers may include subtitles, especially since many viewers scroll through social media and watch with the volume off (Thilk, 2016). The goal of the pre-trailer is to snag the viewer's attention and get them to watch the full trailer (McLaughlin, 2016).

Both teasers and pre-trailers adapt an original art form and mold it to a changing digital landscape where old styles of advertising can quickly become boring and easily ignored. Indeed, the digital age has dramatically impacted the movie industry, including the way trailers are shared. "Until the advent of the Internet, [trailers] were not seen after the initial cinema screening, they were not well archived, and they bore no mark of an individual voice or producer" (Johnston, 2009, p. 2). Now, trailers are continually available to view and pass on. Sharing a trailer or teaser with friends on social media has become a key component of word-of-mouth marketing; this is often a huge win for movie producers (as with other advertisers) since it becomes possible to reach consumers in a more authentic, less intrusive way.

Social media sites and other digital platforms are vital for distributing trailers to potential moviegoers before and during a movie's time in the theater: "Decisions on what to watch, what not to watch, and *how* to watch are often made while consuming [promotional materials] [...] by the time we actually encounter 'the show itself,' we have already begun to decode it and to preview its meanings" (Gray, 2010, p. 3). The ever-expanding array of digital options offers more and more opportunities for producers to communicate their trailer. At the same time, however, the formidable influence that trailers hold in the modern market raises some questions.

## Ethical Concerns

“It’s the movies that have really been running things in America ever since they were invented. They show you what to do, how to do it, when to do it, [and] how to feel about it”. This quote attributed to Andy Warhol expresses the dominant place the film industry has captured in modern American life (Martinique, 2018). Even with all of the technological advancements and new methods of distribution, there are still some critical questions that producers must consider, particularly in light of potential ethical concerns.

What is the obligation of a trailer to accurately portray a film’s message? Is there any obligation? A fairly common complaint of movie-goers is that trailers can be misleading. Should trailer producers be held to a system of industry standards or legal requirements to avoid alleged false advertising? This issue is further complicated by the nature of trailers as summaries of stories: does creative license protect producers from lawsuits?

These concerns are warranted because of the effectiveness of trailers in giving a sample of the full product. “As with all promos, they are ads, but they are also a taste test of films to come, offering some of a film’s first pleasures, meanings, and ideas” (Gray, 2010, p. 50). But what about trailers that depict a “taste test” of a film that does not resemble the actual “full course” of the movie? As mentioned above, “all art is communication” (Crockett, 2006). Artists may convey messages through their work, but one must remember that communication is always open to misinterpretation. Often this occurs on the part of the audience, but it may also be exploited by the artists themselves.

One ethical dilemma producers face is that of cutting misleading trailers. An article in *The New York Times* posed the following query: “Just how different can a trailer be without

becoming false advertising?” (Pogue, 2008). The author went on to question the differences between rearranging scenes within the trailer versus adding material that is not in the film itself. The way producers edit trailers can be intentionally ambiguous and may seem misleading in several ways, including in genre and target audience. For example, trailers for *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* famously left out one key point — it’s a musical. Many audience members were upset at the allegedly dishonest advertising, with some speculating that the trailer was intentionally designed to be deceptive in order to make more money.

There are no easy answers to these questions. However, it is important to note that in many of these complex concerns, there exists an underlying matter of the relationship of art to commercial advertising. There is a fine line between creative license and false advertising, and this is made still more complicated because, like other forms of art, films and trailers are inherently subjective products. A further examination of the role of art in advertising would be a great help in addressing these issues.

### **Conclusion**

Whether viewed online or at the theater, a theatrical trailer sets the stage for an audience’s expectations: “Trailers have thus become an important part of the cinema-going experience [...] they bring to a head the joys of anticipations, like the opening orchestral hum before a live performance” (Gray, 2010, p. 50). This paper evaluated trailers in the context of both advertisement and art, explored the process of producing a trailer, and considered the evolution of trailers and their developing function within the movie industry.

The complexities of modern trailers make a simplistic classification impossible. Trailers are created for a number of goals and must be understood in a variety of ways. Fundamentally, trailers are advertisements that must promote their product well or suffer the consequences, including a less-than-ideal opening weekend. A film's marketing campaign aims to sell a compelling story to potential moviegoers in order to persuade them to purchase tickets; how successful a trailer is directly impacts the number of tickets sold at the box office, which in turn affects home entertainment and merchandising sales. Trailers communicate meaning as advertisements, but also as forms of art. The creative elements of trailers — emotion, music, storytelling, etc. — and the way these elements are arranged can greatly contribute to the appeal a trailer offers an audience. As both an advertisement and an art, trailers play a vital role in promoting a movie.

Much remains to be researched within the realm of film studies, including many aspects related to trailers. Just as they have greatly evolved since their first usage over a century ago, trailers will likely continue to adapt to suit the needs of producers and the demands of consumers. Trailers' content, style, or perhaps even medium may change, but as long as there are people, there will be stories to share. As Christopher Dodd, former Chairman and CEO of the Motion Pictures Association of America, concluded, "...movies continue to play a vital role in our lives and our cultures. Around the world, storytelling – and the movie-going experience that brings great stories to life – is very much alive and well" (*Theatrical*, 2017, p. 3).

## References

- Adajian, T. (2018, August 14). The Definition of Art. In E. W. Zalta (Ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved February 22, 2019, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/art-definition/#TraDef>
- Art [Def. 1]. (n.d.). In *New American Oxford Dictionary*. Retrieved February 23, 2019.
- Art [Def. 1.1]. (n.d.). In *Oxford Dictionaries*. Retrieved February 23, 2019, from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/art>
- Blakely, L. (2015, February 20). The film shop that cuts Hollywood's hottest trailers. *Inc.* Retrieved November 17, 2018, from <https://www.inc.com/lindsay-blakely/wild-card-hollywoods-independent-movie-trailer-power-house.html>
- Crockett, R. (2006, November 18). Art and Communication [Blog post]. Retrieved February 21, 2019, from <http://artandperception.com/2006/11/art-and-communication.html>
- Einstein, M. (2017). *Advertising: What everyone needs to know*. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unebraskalincoln-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4883792#>
- Felton, G. (2013). *Advertising concept and copy* (Third ed.). New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- G is for Golden: The MPAA Film Ratings at 50* [PDF]. (2018, November). Motion Picture Association of America.
- Gesenhues, A. (2015, July 9). Top 5 Summer Movie Trailers: Google Says 81% Of People Who Watched A Trailer Online Saw It On YouTube. Retrieved February 8, 2019, from

<https://marketingland.com/top-5-summer-movie-trailers-google-says-81-of-people-who-watched-a-trailer-online-saw-it-on-youtube-134653>

Gray, J. (2010). *Show sold separately: Promos, spoilers, and other media paratexts*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Hooton, C. (2017, January 19). We spoke to the people who make film trailers. Retrieved February 21, 2019, from <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/film-trailers-editors-interview-create-teasers-tv-spots-a7531076.html>

How Do Movies, TV Shows, Music, and Video Games Get Rated for Content? (n.d.). Retrieved February 23, 2019, from <https://www.hg.org/legal-articles/how-do-movies-tv-shows-music-and-video-games-get-rated-for-content-35246>

Johnston, K. M. (2009). *Coming soon: Film trailers and the selling of Hollywood technology*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc.

Kernan, L. (2004). *Coming attractions: Reading American movie trailers*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Kim, D. (2014, March 12). Re: Who makes the best movie trailers? [Forum comment]. Retrieved February 23, 2019, from <https://www.quora.com/Who-makes-the-best-movie-trailers>

Kitchen, M. (2018, July 23). Meet the People Who Grind Out the Best Movie Trailers in the World. Retrieved February 23, 2019, from <https://www.theringer.com/movies/2018/7/23/17601024/movie-trailer-editors-marvel-pixar-how-made>



- Lehu, J. (2007) *Branded entertainment: Product placement & brand strategy in the entertainment business*. Philadelphia, PA: Kogan Page.
- Malki, D. (2009). Breaking into trailers. *Nikki Rice and David Malki*. Retrieved November 17, 2018, from <http://davidmalki.com/editor/breakingin.html>
- Martinique, E. (2018, January 22). Unforgettable Examples from the 1985 Andy Warhol Advertising Portfolio. Retrieved February 9, 2019, from <https://www.widewalls.ch/andy-warhol-advertising-portfolio-1985/paramount/>
- McClintock, P. (2014, January 28). Theater Owners Seek New Rules Shortening Movie Trailers (Exclusive). Retrieved January 18, 2019, from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/theater-owners-seek-new-rules-559164>
- McLaughlin, M. (2016, November 17). What movie trailers tell us about advertising's evolution [Blog post]. Retrieved November 17, 2018, from <https://extremereach.com/blog/what-movie-trailers-tell-us-about-advertisings-evolution-2>
- Persinger, J. (2014, August 27). The 6 Most Hilariously Misleading Movie Trailers. Retrieved February 21, 2019, from [http://www.cracked.com/article\\_21482\\_the-6-most-hilariously-misleading-movie-trailers.html](http://www.cracked.com/article_21482_the-6-most-hilariously-misleading-movie-trailers.html)
- Pistoletto, M. (2010, July). Art's Responsibility—Artist as Sponsor of Thought. Retrieved February 23, 2019, from <http://www.philamuseum.org/exhibitions/414.html?page=2>
- Pogue, D. (2008, January 3). When Movies Don't Live Up to the Trailer. Retrieved February 9, 2019, from <https://pogue.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/01/03/when-movies-dont-live-up-to-the-trailer/>

Popova, M. (2013, July 17). What Is Art? A Few Famous Definitions, From Antiquity to Today.

Retrieved February 23, 2019, from

<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/06/what-is-art-a-few-famous-definitions-from-antiquity-to-today/258871/>

Roos, D. (2008, September 25). How Movie Marketing Works. Retrieved February 15, 2019,

from <https://entertainment.howstuffworks.com/movie-marketing1.htm>

Ross, J. (2017, January 26). 14 Secrets of Movie Trailer Editors. *Mental Floss*. Retrieved

November 27, 2018, from

<http://mentalfloss.com/article/91351/14-secrets-movie-trailer-editors>

Rubin, R. (2018, December 19). The Biggest Box Office Hits and Flops of 2018. Retrieved

February 9, 2019, from

<https://variety.com/2018/film/news/box-office-hits-flops-2018-1203079474/>

Schillaci, S. (2011, October 9). FilmDistrict Sued Over 'Misleading' 'Drive' Trailer (Video).

Retrieved February 23, 2019, from

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/drive-filmdistrict-lawsuit-ryan-gosling-245871>

Segrave, K. (2004). *Product placement in Hollywood films*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland &

Company, Inc.

Serafino, J. (2016, September 1). Why are movie previews called trailers? [Blog post]. Retrieved

November 17, 2018, from

<http://mentalfloss.com/article/83734/why-are-movie-previews-called-trailers>

- Snyder, C. (2018, July 25). Here's the incredible amount of work that goes into making an award-winning movie trailer. Retrieved February 21, 2019, from <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-movie-trailers-are-made-2018-7?jwsourc=cl>
- Spangler, T. (2018, December 8). 'Avengers: Endgame' Trailer Smashes 24-Hour Video Views Record. Retrieved February 8, 2019, from <https://variety.com/2018/digital/news/avengers-endgame-record-trailer-worldwide-24-hour-views-1203085074/>
- St. Clair, N. (2014). How to tell a meaningful story through video. *Forbes*. Retrieved November 23, 2018, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/neilstclair/2014/11/30/how-to-tell-a-meaningful-story-through-video/#744745a078df>
- Theatrical Market Statistics: 2016* [PDF]. (2017, March). Motion Picture Association of America.
- THEME Report: 2017* [PDF]. (2018, April). Motion Picture Association of America.
- Thilk, C. (2016, September 23). 2 New Movie Trailers From This Week Show How Hollywood Is Evolving the Format. Retrieved February 27, 2019, from <https://www.adweek.com/creativity/2-new-movie-trailers-week-show-how-hollywood-evolving-format-173690/>
- Turner, B. (2015, April 24). Why is a movie's first week box office so important? Retrieved January 18, 2019, from <https://entertainment.howstuffworks.com/why-is-movie-first-week-box-office-important.htm>

Zara, C. (2017, March 22). Here's who goes to the movies-broken down by age and race.

Retrieved February 9, 2019, from

<https://www.fastcompany.com/4033002/heres-who-goes-to-the-movies-broken-down-by-age-and-race>